

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES PATENT

ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM FOR 36V AUTOMOBILES

Applicants: Louis R. Nerone
Benito Trevino

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to electrical power conversion systems, and, more specifically, to providing a means to operate twelve volt to fourteen volt (12V-14V) equipment off of a vehicle electrical power system operating at a different voltage with the additional ability to control the operating states/parameters of a load using the vehicle's existing electrical power bus as a communication medium.

Electrical power demands on automobiles and other vehicle electrical systems have been growing due to increasing requirements for electrical power by peripheral equipment and by the vehicle components themselves. This is because vehicle manufacturers are not only increasingly adding electrically powered features for convenience, but manufacturers are also increasingly replacing mechanically, hydraulically, and pneumatically powered components with electrically powered components, typically with the intent to increase both vehicle performance and component reliability while also reducing total vehicle weight. Increasing computerization of vehicles has also tended to increase the electrical power requirements of vehicle power systems.

However, conventional vehicle electrical systems, many of which operate at fourteen volts (14V) DC while running and use twelve volt (12V) batteries for starting, often cannot keep up with the anticipated electrical demands. This is partly due to the fact that low voltage systems require high current capacity when compared to higher voltage systems. High current capacity, in turn, requires a heavier gauge wiring system to accommodate the higher currents, which could lead to heavier wiring harnesses and larger resistive heat losses. These shortcomings could make conventional vehicle electrical systems unsatisfactory for many modern vehicles, and may lead to the need for higher-voltage electrical power systems.

To respond to these changing circumstances, vehicle manufacturers have explored different electrical system standards. One standard is a forty-two volt (42V) DC electrical power system while operating, but using a thirty-six volt (36V) battery for starting the vehicle engine or operating equipment while the engine is not running.

Such higher-voltage systems might reduce wiring harness size and may increase the total electrical power available for practical vehicle use.

For many different reasons, some loads on a thirty-six volt to forty-two volt (36V-42V) electrical power system may continue to require power at about twelve volts to fourteen volts (12V-14V). For example, experience has shown that thicker twelve volt (12V) light bulb filaments are often more durable than the thinner higher voltage light bulb filaments, which are consequently often less rugged. Accordingly, there is a need in the art for a means of providing twelve volts to fourteen volts (12V-14V) electrical power to vehicle components when the vehicle electrical power bus operates at a different voltage.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides an electrical power conversion system for delivering electrical power to a load by converting electrical power received from an electrical power bus at a first voltage (V_1) into electrical power at a second voltage (V_2) to power the load. The system also provides a means to control the states and/or operating parameters of the load.

A load transmitter is used to output a communication signal containing encoded load information coupled onto the electrical power bus to control a load receiver or the load itself. The encoded load information may be made up of the desired load state, status, and address. The load transmitter is comprised of: a data encoder, which encodes the desired load state and address information into a data output; a data transmitter, which receives the data and transmits a communication signal; and a coupler, which then couples the communication signal onto the electrical power bus.

A load receiver is used to control the load and to convert the electrical power bus power provided at a first voltage (V_1) into a load electrical power output at a second voltage (V_2). The load receiver is comprised of: a decoupler, which decouples the communication signal from the electrical power bus and isolates the load receiver from the electrical power bus; a data receiver, which receives the

communication signal and which derives the encoded data therefrom; a data decoder to decode the encoded data and convert it into a converter signal; and a power converter, which receives the converter signal from the data decoder. The state or operating condition of the load can then be set via the converter signal, according to the desired load state and address information. The power converter also converts the electrical power from the electrical power bus at the first voltage (V_1) into power at the second voltage (V_2) for powering a load or load subsystem.

The load state, status, and address information may be used to identify and locate the load (or the associated power converter) and/or to set the load operating states or conditions (or the states and conditions of the associated power converter).

In this way, the electrical power system can feed loads at a second voltage (V_2) when provided with an electrical power bus at a first voltage (V_1), and the state of a load can be controlled.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent with reference to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing the basic elements of the load receiver that connects to the vehicle electrical power bus and to a load.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram showing the basic elements of the load transmitter that receives inputs from a source and transmits them onto the electrical power bus.

FIG. 3A and FIG 3B are block diagrams showing alternate possible embodiments of a load receiver.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram showing a possible embodiment of the load transmitter.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram showing a possible use of the invention utilizing a single load transmitter and multiple load receivers, all connected via a 42 volt vehicle electrical bus.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE
INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to electrical power conversion systems for vehicles, and, more specifically, to providing a means to operate twelve volt to fourteen volt (12V-14V) equipment off of a vehicle electrical power system operating at a different voltage, such as a thirty-six volt to forty-two volt (36V to 42V) DC system, with the additional capability of controlling the operating state of a load using the vehicle's existing electrical power bus as a communication means.

FIG. 1 illustrates the load receiver 1 of the electrical power conversion system, according to one possible embodiment of the invention. An electrical power bus 3 provides electrical power at a first voltage (V_1) to a power converter 5 via a power converter input 7. The power converter 5 may be, for example, a commercially available direct-current to alternating-current (DC-to-AC) inverter or, alternatively, the power converter 5 may be a commercially available direct-current to direct-current (DC-to-DC) converter. The power converter 5 has a power output 9 which provides electrical power at a second voltage (V_2) to a load 11. For example, the power converter 5 may utilize an input from a higher-voltage vehicle electrical power bus 3, such as a thirty-six volts to forty-two volts direct current (36VDC-42VDC) automobile electrical system which utilizes a thirty-six volt (36V) battery and a forty-two volt (42V) system bus. The power converter could then provide a lower voltage power output 9, such as approximately twelve volts to fourteen volts (12V-14V). Such a system could be used to supply, for example, approximately twelve volts to fourteen volts (12V-14V) power to various loads that utilize this lower voltage. The power output 9 of the power converter 5 might be a DC voltage or an AC voltage, depending on the specific needs of the particular loads or the commercial availability of components and their relative costs.

A decoupler 12 of FIG. 1 decouples a communication signal from the electrical power bus 3 via its input 14. The data receiver 13 receives a communication signal 15 from the decoupler 12, and outputs data 19 derived from the communication signal. The data 19 is input to a data decoder 21, which decodes the encoded data, and outputs a converter signal 23 that is input to the power converter 5.

The actual values of the converter signal 23 may depend on address information that may be used, for example, to determine whether or not the converter is powering a load (or load subsystem) assigned to that address. This enables each load (or load subsystem) to be uniquely identified by an address. The converter signal 23 could be used, for example, to set the state of the load 11 associated with that power converter 5. Load states, discussed hereinbelow, might include such activities as turning the load on or off, for example, by controlling the output of the power converter 5. Alternatively, a load signal 25 could be sent directly to the load 11 for controlling the load states and/or operating parameters directly. Still another embodiment might include a control signal output (not shown) from the power converter 5 to the load 11 to control the operation of the load 11.

As an alternative, the system could also be designed to allow communication from the load back to a using or controlling device or person (not shown). The power converter 5 could provide a status information to a data encoder (not shown), or to the data decoder 21, which could then also act as a data encoder. The encoded data would then be input to a data transmitter (not shown), or to the data receiver 13 which could then also act as a data transmitter, which would then convert the encoded data into a communication signal input to a coupler, or to the decoupler 12 which would then also act as a coupler, for transmittal onto the electrical power bus 3. Alternatively, the load 11 could directly provide status information to the data encoder in a similar manner.

FIG. 2 illustrates the load transmitter 30 as part of the electrical power conversion system. The load transmitter 30 is used for transmitting a communication signal containing the load state and address information and any other desired load information onto the electrical power bus to control the power converter and/or the loads. The desired load information 35 is entered from a source 33 into a data encoder 31 wherein the data is encoded.

The load information might include various load states, such as "on" or "off", and it could also include operating states, for example, such as "low" or "high" for a vehicle headlight. The actual load states used and transmitted by the invention would depend on the actual operating states of the loads. The load information may include the address of the load, so that each load and/or load converter can be uniquely

identified and controlled. The load address might be supplied by the using device or person, or it may be derived or implied by the source 33, or even determined in some other manner. The source 33 might be a switch, a user input device, a controller, a computer, or some other device, for example. Thus, a source can enter commands and desired states into the data transmitter 30 which are then communicated to the various data receivers, and thus the operation of the load can be controlled.

The encoded data 37 is then input to a data transmitter 39. The communication signal 41 of the data transmitter 39 is input to a coupler 43, which then couples the signal onto the electrical power bus 3, and thus the signal is made available to any load receiver units attached to the electrical power bus 3.

Alternatively, the system might utilize a communication bus separate from the vehicle electrical power bus, which might be provided as part of the vehicle itself, and thus invention could control the load states using the communication bus, rather than coupling the communication signal with the electrical power bus.

FIGS. 3A, 3B, 4 and 5 illustrate some specific embodiments of the invention as used to power twelve volt (12V) lamps in a vehicle implementation using the electrical power bus for both electrical power, and to provide a communication path. The load receiver devices shown in FIGS. 3A and 3B are alternative embodiments that perform the functions described for FIG. 1 and the load transmitter device performs the functions described for FIG. 2. Multiple receivers can be utilized to power and/or control multiple loads, as is shown in one embodiment, for example, by FIG. 5.

The embodiments of FIGS. 3A, 3B and 4 utilize a Phase Locked Loop (PLL) configured as a Frequency Shift Keying (FSK) receiver (such as the HEF4046B) and a carrier current transceiver configured as a FSK transmitter (such as the LM1893). It also utilizes a digital encoder and decoder pair (such as the MC145027 and MC145026) The power converter can be a DC-to-AC inverter with a power control interface to control the load states via the input from the digital decoder. Such a power converter could be chosen from a number of commercially available units. A DC-to-DC converter can also be used as an alternative power converter. A reference circuit is shown to provide a reference voltage for the chosen components. FIGS. 3A

and 3B differ in the implementation of the decoupler used in the load receiver for coupling the FSK receiver to the vehicle's electrical power bus.

While the invention has been described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted for elements thereof without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the invention without departing from the essential scope thereof. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiment disclosed as the best mode contemplated for carrying out this invention, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.